

PREFACE

*"We do not own this land; we are caretakers of the land and the plant and animal species that inhabit it. The American people entrust the land to our care, and we shall fulfill their trust. We shall conserve and protect these resources for the future."*¹

At the turn of the 19th century, French scientist J.B. LaMark cautioned that man is destined to extinction by destroying his environment. Two hundred years later, little has been done to preserve our environment, while much has been done to deplete it. As we stand on the threshold of a new century, it is clear that the steps we take today to protect our natural resources will be our legacy to generations in the 21st century and beyond. From a military standpoint, the way we manage our lands will, in part, affect the nation's future defense posture.

In this age of environmental awareness, management of our nation's natural resources must be based on a sound approach and dedicated programs. Crucial to the success of this endeavor is a true, unfaltering commitment from commanders, soldiers, trainers, natural resource personnel, and engineers.

The Department of Defense (DOD) is steward of about 25 million acres of land in the United States, harboring many irreplaceable natural and cultural resources. As our nation continues to grow and develop, these military lands become important as last strongholds for much of our country's dwindling natural resources.

US Army Alaska (USARAK) is custodian for nearly two million acres of predominately undeveloped land on which to carry out its mission. With two large posts in Alaska's interior and a smaller one in the southcentral region, USARAK enjoys a full representation of the unique natural resources and environmental conditions that Alaska has to offer. It is this that makes USARAK's "Northern Warrior" a special kind of soldier who lives and trains in one of the most rugged and beautiful places left on earth.

Nestled below the massive peaks of the Chugach Range, Fort Richardson, Headquarters US Army Alaska, together with neighboring Chugach State Park, gives Anchorage all the charisma and charm of a city poised on the edge of wilderness. The military lands encompass countless lakes and ponds, coastline, vast forested areas, and tundra-covered mountain slopes. They harbor a variety of wildlife including moose, Dall sheep, wolves, brown and black bears, wolverines, lynx, coyote, otters, beavers, bald eagles, trumpeter swans, and a myriad of lesser known species. These natural treasures are contained within a 61,000 acre continuum of ecosystems, making a dramatic transition from the marine environment of Upper Cook Inlet to the spartan alpine peaks of the Chugach Mountains in a distance of less than eight miles. This unique responsibility and opportunity is found nowhere else on lands owned or used by the Department of Defense.

Those who live and train on Fort Richardson well understand and appreciate both the intrinsic and practical value of these lands and their natural resources. The fact that they still exist at all in a relatively natural state is a credit to the Army. Immediately outside the post, land development occurs feverishly whenever and wherever it can and repeated attempts are made to secure either ownership or long-term use of Fort Richardson's valuable training lands for non-training uses. Past losses of training lands and natural resources for uses not supporting the training mission have placed the post in a state of operational concern. Any future losses seriously threaten its military viability.

¹ Robert M. Walker, Assistant Secretary of the Army Testimony before Congress, July 11, 1995

This concern dictates the current policy that any long-term use of Fort Richardson's lands and natural resources that is not clearly in the best interests of the military mission and/or the environment is generally unacceptable. Under Army stewardship, the land and natural resources have been improved and preserved over the years, and the Army intends to continue to preserve them. The condition of these lands is crucial to the military mission, the well-being of the community, and the overall health of the nation's environment.

This Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan is USARAK's authoritative guide for the care and wise use of lands entrusted to the US Army, as endorsed by the Commanding General and other signatory agencies. The plan covers a five-year period, but the philosophy behind it will be used for a much longer period of time. USARAK is committed to using an ecosystem management approach to its natural resources program. This approach helps protect biological diversity and facilitates sound decisions regarding the wise use of renewable natural resources to support the needs of the military mission in the region.

Abundant and diverse natural resources, and a healthy environment for promoting premier training grounds . . . now and forever . . . is the commitment of U.S. Army Alaska.